

Kindlier Side of Lincoln

By Col. A.K.McCLURE

Drawings by Carl Kleinschmidt

MY FORMER article on Abraham Lincoln was wholly taken up with events which forbade any presentation of the kindlier side of the great martyr-President. My first visit to him was when he was profoundly agonized with the perils which confronted him as President-elect, and the second meeting with him was on the occasion when heroic measures had to be adopted to protect him against apprehended assassination, and sadness rather than humor ruled during the intercourse I had with him at Springfield and Harrisburg.

Lincoln was the most notable combination of sadness and mirth that I ever met with in any of our public men. His face in repose, under all circumstances, was one of the saddest I ever beheld. It would brighten in conversation, and at times would portray a measure of sorrow that could not be surpassed. He was from his youth much given to melancholy.

While he was known as fond of sports and brim full of humor, a very large portion of his life was always given to isolation and solitude, when he gave free latitude to the melancholy tendencies of his mind.

Strange as it may seem, he was always a hopeful man, never pessimistic, and always inclined when discussing any question to take the bright side. He was severely conscientious in his convictions and in his actions. He had faith in the present and greater faith in the future. He had been in early life what is now commonly called an agnostic, with a strong inclination to atheism, but in his mature years he never exhibited a trace of it. I have never known any man who had greater reverence for God than Abraham Lincoln. Throughout his writings, political and otherwise, will be found multiplied expressions of his abiding faith in the Great Ruler of nations and individuals.

LINCOLN'S CHARITY AND BIGNESS OF HEART

In a single sentence to be found in Lincoln's second inaugural address the country and the world have the most complete portrayal of his character. When he was inaugurated for a second term as President, on the fourth of March, 1865, the military power of the Confederacy was broken, and many in his position would have exhibited the pride of the victor over the vanquished on such an occasion; but after stating in the kindest and most temperate language the duty of himself and of the patriotic people of the country to protect the Union against dismemberment, he does not utter a word of resentment against the South. "With malice toward none; with charity for all," was the brief and eloquent sentence in which he defined the duty of those who had then substantially destroyed the power of the rebellion. That beautiful expression came from the heart of Abraham Lincoln, and it profoundly impressed the whole country, then wildly impassioned by the bitterness of fraternal strife. He knew the resentments which must confront him in restoring the shattered fragments of the Union, and his supreme desire was to have the bitterness of the conflict perish when peace came.

No man who has filled the Presidential chair was so vindictively and malignantly defamed as was Lincoln in the South. The opponents of the war in the North were guilty of unpardonable assaults upon his integrity, his ability and his methods, but the South had no knowledge of him, as he had filled no important part in national affairs before his election to the Presidency; and his humble birth in Kentucky, close by the birthplace of Jefferson Davis, and his exaggerated rudeness of appearance and manner made the people of the South ready to believe anything to his

discredit. He was proclaimed throughout the Confederacy as a second Nero; as a bloody and remorseless butcher; as a vulgar clown who met the sorrows of the nation with ribald jest. Not a single virtue was conceded to him.

A SIMILARITY BETWEEN LINCOLN AND LEE

On several occasions I heard him speak most feelingly of the defamation heaped upon him by the South, but never did he exhibit the semblance of resentment. More than once I have heard him say: "If these people only knew us better it would be well for both of us." He always spoke of them as "these people," as did General Robert E. Lee, who in personal intercourse usually referred to the Union Army when in front of him as "these people." His last order to Longstreet before Pickett's charge at Gettysburg was: "These people are there and they must be driven away." Both of these great characters of our Civil War are now remembered, and will be remembered for all time, as having never uttered a sentence of resentment relating to their opponents in the war.

While Lincoln was ever in the forefront of those who demanded the most vigorous prosecution of the war and the most ample preparations for it, there was not a day that he did not hope to see the silver lining to the cloud pointing the way to peace; and what he meant by peace was the peace of restored brotherhood. Had he lived until the final surrender of the Confederate Army he would have been favorable to the most generous terms of reconstruction that could have been accepted by the country.

I saw him in August, 1864, when the contest for his reelection was dragging heavily upon our hands and the political horizon seriously clouded. He then believed that he would be defeated by McClellan, as did very many of his friends. He expressed himself about that time in a brief memorandum that he sealed and gave to Secretary Welles to be opened after the election. In that he stated his belief that he would be defeated, and that the remainder of his term after the election would have to be devoted to the consummation of reunion, as it would be of doubtful accomplishment thereafter.

THE PLAN TO INDEMNIFY THE CONFEDERATES

In that conversation he gave me the first intimation of his purpose to try and end the war by paying the South \$400,000,000 as compensation for the freedom of the slaves. He had the proposition written out in his own handwriting, but he well knew that if such a purpose on his part were made public it would make his reelection impossible. He discussed it freely and very earnestly, however, and said that he regarded compensated emancipation as the only way to restore fellowship between the States. He did not doubt the ability of the North to overthrow the military power of the Confederacy, but what he most feared was that the people of the South—driven to desperation by the severe sacrifices they had suffered, and the general desolation of their country that gave them no hope of regaining prosperity—would make their armies disband into guerrilla squads and would be implacable in their resentments against the Government.

In all of the many expressions I heard Lincoln make use of, toward the close of the war, he always exhibited an earnest desire to do something that would impressively teach the Southern people that they were not to be held as conquered subjects of a despotic power, but were to come back into the Union and enjoy the blessings of a reunited people.

Lincoln believed that in no way could he so widely and profoundly impress the Southern people with the desire of the Government to deal with them in generous justice as by paying them \$400,000,000 as compensation for the loss of their slaves.

I can never forget the earnestness with which he spoke of this proposition at a time when he did not dare breathe it to the public. He said the war was costing \$4,000,000 a day, and that it would certainly last for more than four months, thus costing the Government more than the whole amount he would have gladly given as compensation for the freedom of the slaves, not to calculate the sacrifice of life and destruction of property. He fretted because he could not convey to the South what he believed should be done to close the war and enable them to reestablish their homes and fruitful fields. He believed in his theory of compensated



"With malice toward none; with charity for all."



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emancipation until his death, and he abandoned it only a short time before the surrender of Lee. He would have suggested it to Vice-President Stephens, of the Confederacy, at their City Point meeting in the winter of 1865, had not Stephens advised him at the outset that he was instructed by Jefferson Davis to entertain no proposition that did not perpetuate the Confederacy, and after his return he wrote a message to Congress in favor of it, submitted it to his Cabinet, by which it was nearly or quite unanimously disapproved, and he indorsed upon it the disapproval of the Cabinet and laid it away.

Lincoln's kindness of heart was exhibited under all circumstances. For a long time he impaired the discipline of the Army by his refusal to permit the execution of soldiers condemned by court martial, and in no instance did the unfortunate ever appeal to him without exciting his warmest sympathy. In the fierce passions of civil war the desire was general throughout the North that the leaders of the rebellion should be banished or executed when the Confederacy should be overthrown, and these expressions of bitterness were surging against Lincoln every day; but I am entirely safe in saying that no one who conversed with him ever heard him utter a single sentence of resentment against any one, North or South. Knowing the intense asperities which prevailed throughout the North, he carefully avoided all discussion of the policy he would pursue when the rebellion collapsed, but he gave repeated intimations of his desire to bring the South back into the most fraternal relations possible.

MR. LINCOLN'S APPLICATION OF AN OLD STORY

A short time before Grant's final movement against Lee in the spring of 1865, that resulted in the capture of Richmond and of Lee's army, Colonel Forney and I called upon the President without any special purpose beyond paying our respects. Lincoln was unusually cheerful, as he had every confidence in the early overthrow of the Southern armies. We had conversed a few minutes when General Ben Butler joined us, and he at once opened up the question of punishing the leaders of the rebellion. He was fierce, vindictive and implacable, and Colonel Forney, who had suffered much from the South, having been prevented from entering Buchanan's Cabinet by the Southern leaders, made the great battle of his life for the preservation of the Union. He was impulsive and enthusiastic in all things, and he gave rather hearty accord to Butler's expressions. I said nothing but watched Lincoln carefully, knowing that he would not be in harmony with the views presented to him, and anxious to see how he would meet them. After hearing them out, he told the story of the Western man who was a chronic drunkard, and who had been taken up by his friends over and over again on promise of reform, until they finally notified him that if he gave way to dissipation again they would abandon him as a hopeless case. He maintained his sobriety for some time, but finally the desire for a stimulating drink mastered him, and when he called for a glass of soda he said:

"Go couldn't you put a wee drop of the crater in it unbeknown to me?"

Lincoln always laughed heartily at his own jests, and with equal heartiness at the jests of others, and after the laugh had ended he said that he thought it might save much trouble if the leaders of the rebellion got away "unbeknown" to us. That simple story left no one in doubt as to Lincoln's purpose to make no martyrs to be deified by the South.

MRS. LINCOLN AND HER MISFORTUNE

No one could know Lincoln well without seeing some features of his home life. I have seen him in grave conversation with public men on the most momentous subjects, when "Tad" Lincoln, his favorite boy, would rush into the room, bounce on to his father's lap, throw his arms around his neck, and play hobby-horse on his foot regardless of all the sacred affairs of State. There never was a frown from the father, and the fretting questions of even a great war seemed to perish until "Tad" had completed his romp. The greatest sorrow of Lincoln's life shadowed the altar of his own home, and it was one he had to suffer in silence. The calamity that befell Mrs. Lincoln after his death was visible to those who had opportunity to see for themselves at an early period of his Administration. Mrs. Lincoln was mentally unbalanced, but not sufficiently so to prevent the performance of her social functions, and her vagaries often led to severe reflections upon the President, at times even to the extent of charging her with sympathy for the South, as her brothers were prominent in the Southern Army.

I first saw Mrs. Lincoln at Harrisburg on the night that Lincoln made his midnight journey to Washington, and the greatest difficulty we had on that occasion was to prevent her from creating a scene that would have given publicity to her movement. I thought her a fool, and was so disgusted with her that I never spoke to her afterward, although I had frequently gone with ladies to her receptions. I wronged her, for she was then not wholly responsible, and soon after Lincoln's death the climax came, leaving her to grope out the remainder of her life in the starless midnight of insanity. With Lincoln's many

other sorrows, considering his love of home and family, it may be understood how keenly he suffered and how he was clouded by shadows for which the world could give no relief.

HOW STORY-TELLING SERVED AS A SAFETY-VALVE

Lincoln has been very unjustly presented by many to the public as a profane and obscene jester. These accusations are wholly false. He had a natural gift for humor that had been cultivated by the natural conditions in which he grew up in the sparsely settled West, where Judges and lawyers traveled the circuit, and sat in the bar-room of the village inn during their evenings, where humor was ever in demand. He told many stories, and always most aptly illustrating some purpose he had in view. It was this love of humor that occasionally mastered him even when almost in the depth of despair, and that saved him when the silver cord was often strained to its utmost tension by his ceaseless and exacting responsibilities. I have many times seen him when sorely depressed by the disasters to our Army and the clouds which the Angel of Sorrow had so widely scattered over the homes of the land, and wondered whether he must not suddenly break under the fearful strain that was upon him; but often when he had drunk the cup of sorrow to the dregs his face would instantly brighten like the sun suddenly escaping from a cloud and throwing its refulgence upon the world, as he would halt in his painful expressions and begin, "By the way," and follow it with a story illustrating the subject he had been discussing. It was this quality of humor that was Lincoln's safety-valve. It was the only relief he had from the responsibilities and sorrows crushed almost any other man.

THE GOVERNOR CURTIN AFFAIR

In the early summer of 1863, Colonel Forney and I called upon Lincoln in company with General Cameron to suggest that the President should tender a mission to Governor Curtin, whose health was so severely broken that his friends believed he could not survive a campaign for reelection. Forney was the friend of Cameron and Curtin; Cameron and Curtin were bitter foes whose intercourse was confined strictly to official matters, and Cameron and I had never been political friends, although our friendly, personal relations were never disturbed. I had never supported him in his political aspirations, and he had never been my friend even when I was the regular nominee of my party. Cameron desired Curtin out of the way because he wanted a more friendly candidate for Governor; I desired him out of the way because I believed it was a choice between retirement and death. All agreeing, therefore, that Curtin should retire, we went to the President to ask him to open the way for Curtin's withdrawal by tendering him a foreign mission. It was the first time that Cameron and I had asked the same favor at his hands, and Lincoln was much amused at the situation. He said that of course with such a combination in favor of Curtin he would want to give him a mission, but said he:

"I am in the position of young Sheridan when his father told him that he must cease his rakish life and take a wife, to which he answered, 'All very well, father, but whose wife shall I take?'" He added that he wanted to give Curtin a mission but the missions were all full, and said he, "Whose mission shall I take?"

It was agreed, however, that he should consider the subject until the next morning, when he requested me to call to receive his answer.

I did so, and he gave me an autograph letter to Curtin tendering him a first-class mission at the close of his gubernatorial term. Curtin gave public notice of his acceptance of it and of his retirement from the gubernatorial contest, but within a few weeks thereafter a number of the leading counties of the State gave peremptory instructions in his favor, and demanded that he should not be permitted to retire. He was nominated solely against his will, and reelected, his life as a sacrifice.

MAKING A JUDGE IN SHORT ORDER

One other occasion on which General Cameron and I called upon Lincoln to ask the same favor was when Congress was about to close on the fourth of March. The President always

attended the closing hours of a Congress by going to the President's room in the Capitol to receive bills requiring action before the adjournment. It was thus that Grant's renomination as General of the Army was sent in by President Arthur just in time for the approval of the Senate, even after the hands of the clock had been turned backward. A prominent member of the Legislature from one of the Northern counties, who was a warm, personal friend of mine and also a political friend of Cameron, discovered on the morning of the last day of the session that there was a vacancy in a territorial Judgeship that he desired. He appealed to Cameron and then to me, asking us to go together, as he presumed that Lincoln would not hesitate to make the appointment if thus jointly asked. Cameron and I went to the President's room in the Capitol, where Lincoln was very busy and we at once stated our mission. He was again much amused at the situation, and said that of course he would have to do it, but that he never was so busy in his life. Said he:

"I am in the position of the Irish dragoon in front of the enemy, who was writing a letter to his mother, in which he said: 'I am writing this letter with a pistol in each hand and a sword in the other.'"

He had his laugh over the story, in which we all joined, for no man told a story in a more fascinating way, and then in three lines he sent a message to the Senate by which our mutual friend was made a Judge within ten minutes from the time the application was presented.

There are many who yet believe, or affect to believe, that Lincoln was a rude jester, and I have heard scores of stories told as "Lincoln's stories," which he never would have repeated in any circle. There was not a trace of vulgarity in the man; there was no love for the indelicate; no fondness for anything that would offend the most refined sensibilities. He was not always graceful in speech, but he was never vulgar, and I have never heard of any who could testify to profanity on his part. One of the most interesting exhibitions of the charm he could throw about men of culture in his plain and at times quaint conversation I happened to witness when a number of British noblemen, then visiting the country, desired to meet the President.



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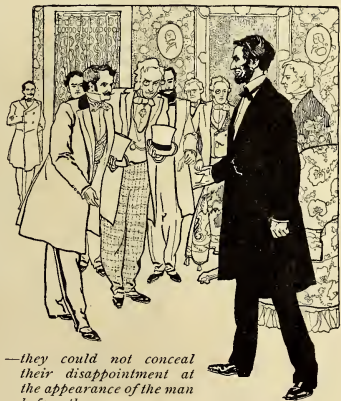
HOW MR. LINCOLN IMPRESSED THE ENGLISHMEN

I was sitting alone with Lincoln when Secretary Seward entered and advised him that the English men would be glad to see him, and he told him to bring them in at once. I arose to go, but he asked me to remain. I took a seat on the sofa at the farther side of the room, and saw some half-dozen English noblemen come in to visit the American President. They were evidently men of unusual intelligence and accomplished graces, and when Lincoln uncoiled his long legs and rose to meet them in his rather awkward way they could not conceal their disappointment at the appearance of the man before them, but they were well bred and courteous to the uttermost. They were anxiously studying our Government and our people, and their questions to Lincoln gave him abundant opportunity to present his best qualities in speaking of our institutions.

It was an interesting study to watch the faces of those accomplished and graceful noblemen as they gradually forgot the lack of manner in the great man before them and learned to appreciate his intelligence, his patriotism, and his intimate knowledge of all that pertained to the great Republic whose grandeur they were studying. They were probably thirty minutes with Lincoln, but before they left they were profoundly impressed by him, and the sudden flush of disappointment they had first betrayed had perished in their visible and wonderful admiration for the man. They heartily grasped him by the hand as they bade him adieu, and I am quite sure that none of those English noblemen ever thereafter uttered a disrespectful word of Abraham Lincoln. When they had gone he gave vent to the amusement they had given him by their surprise when they first met him.

No man ever came in contact with Abraham Lincoln who did not learn to love, honor, and even reverence him. His ablest political enemies ever paid him the highest tributes, not only to his personal attributes, but to his mastery of ability, and none surpassed Stephen A. Douglas, the ablest foe man Lincoln ever met, in his appreciation of Lincoln's qualities. He had to accept vastly the gravest responsibilities ever put upon any President of the United States, and I am quite sure that no other man could have filled Lincoln's place during the Civil War with equal safety to the Republic. Had he been vindictive and resentful his fame would not be without blemish to-day.

What was to me the most beautiful tribute I have ever heard paid to him came from the lips of Jefferson Davis, when I visited him at his home in Mississippi some ten years after the war. He never tired of discussing the character and the actions of Lincoln, and asked me many questions about his personal qualities. After he had heard all I could give him in the brief time that I had, he said with a degree of mingled earnestness and pathos that few could have equaled: "Next to the destruction of the Confederacy, the death of Abraham Lincoln was the darkest day the South has ever known."



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